

**REMARKS**

Favorable reconsideration and allowance of the subject application are requested.

This amendment follows a most helpful personal interview with Examiner Drodge on June 24, 2003. It is earnestly believed that the interview materially advanced prosecution of this application. The applicants' undersigned attorney sincerely appreciates Examiner Drodge for the courtesies and thoughtful review of the issues present in this case.

The Examiner Interview Summary Statement for such interview has been reviewed by the undersigned who acknowledges that it represents a full and complete record of the substantive discussions had during the interview.

The Examiner will note that a formal Notice of Appeal has already been filed on Monday, June 16, 2003, so as to toll the time period running against this application as set by the "final" official action dated January 15, 2003. Hence, the filing of the RCE is timely as it was filed within the two month time period set by the filing of such appeal Notice – that is, by August 16, 2003.

With entry of the present amendment, claims 23-46 will be pending herein, of which claim 23 represents the only independent claim. However, claim 23 has been amended so as to emphasize various structural and functional distinctions attributable to the present invention. For example, the claimed filter module is now recited to comprise "...a separable stack of *individual self-contained* filter module elements". These "filter module elements" are thus defined as being the *individual self-contained* filter regions as well as the *individual self-contained* first and second types of draining layers. Many of the other changes proposed to claim 23 are for purpose of clarity and/or syntax.

Most of the "new" dependent claims correspond to the previously submitted dependent claims, but have been revised so as to be consistent with the language now employed in claim 23. Proposed new claim 27 is based on the invention embodiment shown in FIGURE 6 and its corresponding descriptive text at page 10 of the specification.

The minor typographical error in the paragraph on page 9, lines 5-22 helpfully identified by the Examiner has been corrected.

The Examiner will recall that one major distinction between the present invention and the applied Gneuss (USP 5,449,458) and Naruo et al (USP 4,871,456) references is that each functional element of the claimed filter module – namely, the filtering layer and the two types of draining layers are **self-contained elements**. This means that such elements are separate, individual building blocks for constituting the filter module which upon assembling the module are just put one on top of another in the desired sequence, without necessarily bonding, welding or otherwise fixedly attaching them together.

As a result, at a later stage when the filter module needs to be regenerated or disassembled, the individual self-contained elements may simply be taken apart without debonding the various functional layers – an attribute that is especially important for the filtering layers. That is, ease of separation of the filtering layers is of specific importance in cases where the deposit on or within the filtering material is to be collected since then such deposit may only be separated from the material of the filter layer as such.

Furthermore, mounting of the module is very simple in that the various functional elements are arranged in stack form and then subsequently clamped together either by external additional clamping means and/or by clamping devices which may be provided by a part of the functional layers of the filter module itself.

The present invention also promotes versatility and universality. That is, a very small number of functional filtering module layers are sufficient to build filter modules with various functions adapted to the respective actual requirements.

One of the major advantages of the construction of the inventive filtering modules is that the filter elements or filter layers do not need a separate seal at the edges at the outer and inner periphery of the layers, and especially need not be welded. Instead, merely clamping the various functional layers of the filter module together provides sufficient pressure on the edges of the filter layers to seal them against the filtrate space or filtrate chamber and the non-filtrate chamber.

In case a plurality of different filtering layers are used in stack form, it is only necessary that the filtering layer which serves as the end filter (the more dense filtering material) is tightly compressed to provide a seal with respect to filtrate and non-filtrate chambers. All other filtering layers need not necessarily be compressed to seal off the filtrate and non-filtrate chambers, since the edges of such layers will soon be blocked by ingress of non-filtrate and the particular material transported therealong.

It is therefore noted that the applied Gneuss and Naruo et al references do not disclose or suggest a filter module whereby each functional element thereof – namely, the filtering layer and the two types of draining layers – is a respective **self-contained** element. As such, withdrawal of the rejections advanced under 35 USC §103(a) and based on such references and early passage of the subject application to issue are in order.

Accordingly, in view of the amendments and remarks presented during the interview of earlier today, and the presently filed Preliminary Amendment, withdrawal of the rejections under 35 USC §103(a) as allegedly unpatentable over Gneuss and Naruo et al is believed to be in order.

**STROHM et al**  
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An early and favorable reply on the merits is solicited.

Respectfully submitted,

**NIXON & VANDERHYE P.C.**

By: 

Bryan H. Davidson  
Reg. No. 30,251

BHD:Imy  
1100 North Glebe Road, 8th Floor  
Arlington, VA 22201-4714  
Telephone: (703) 816-4000  
Facsimile: (703) 816-4100